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## Local Supervisors and Action Learning

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**Title of proposal:**

Local supervisors and action learning

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**First and second choice network:**

10. Teacher education research

27. Didactics – learning and teaching

**3 - 5 keywords:**

Teachers learning, professional development, action learning

**General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework (up to 600 words):**

In 2012 a municipality in Denmark launched an ambitious training program for teachers. The aim of the training was not only to develop the teachers competencies, but also to establish new ways for teachers of collaborating at the schools, enabling an on-going development of the teachers practices through team collaboration. A main objective was to make effects lasting after the project deadline. However, insights from international training and research projects suggest that this is a very difficult task (Christiansen & Günther, 2011; Shear, Gallagher & Patell, 2011; Henriksen, Buhl, Misfeldt & Hanghøj, 2011). In fact, Maurer has estimated that 70% fails, in terms of even changing practices within the given period (Maurer, 2010). Being aware of the difficulty of the task, the training drew on central insights from research. It was based on the teachers existing practices, which Fixsen has pointed as a crucial factor (Fixsen et. Al. 2005, p. 70). It also involved an organizing of active collegial relations between teachers, which is essential in order to provide lasting effects (Sølberg, Bundsgaard & Højgaard, 2013).

The specific training program design drew on inspiration from 'action learning' as described by Plauborg, Vinter Andersen & Bayer (2007). This method is developed as an alternative to traditional course based in-service training, and has an underlying assumption that solutions of practical problems requires a practical understanding, which can be gained iteratively and in collaboration with colleagues through attempts of solving it. In the training program conducted, the action-learning concept involved the establishment of teams consisting of three – five teachers, a local supervisor and an external consultant.

In this paper, we focus on the local supervisor and his/her possibilities of participating in and supporting the implementation of the training program. The role of the supervisor is especially interesting since this role meant to handle a leading role in the on-going

development after project deadline. In the training program, the supervisor handled a facilitating function in the collaboration among teachers, and the anchoring of the concept in the schools was attempted through this function. The supervising has another interesting dimension, since the local supervisor at the same time functions as a teacher and as a supervisor. This double-role implies a equal footing that either can assist or hinder the training.

Our research is informed by theoretical insights inspired by a notion of logics developed by Nielsen (2012). Through the notion of logics Nielsen has shown that the collaboration of teachers can be driven by logics that are not necessarily coherent with the purpose of the activities to which they are engaged (Nielsen 2012). This notion implies that some everyday phenomenon's in school-life are experienced as more urgent than others, thus producing certain priorities among the teachers (Nielsen 2012). In our research, we apply this notion to examine how the actors experience their role in in the action-learning training program and focus on the tacit expectations arising to the supervisor because of the active logic. Our objective can be articulated in the research questions below:

- Which logics can be identified among the actors in the implementation of action-learning?
- How does these logics influence the supervisor's possibilities to participate in and support the training?

Through this notion of logics, we apply a view of the actors as subjected to certain logics, which allow them to interpret and act in specific ways and at the same time produces expectations from one actor to other actors. Through the expectations arising from the active logics among the actors, we explore how this influence the supervisor's possibilities of meeting these expectations and thus participating successfully in the project and supporting the participating teachers.

### **Methods/methodology (up to 400 words):**

The study draw on data gathered from individual qualitative interviews from respondents in two different schools participating in the action-learning training. We have interviewed all participating actors in the action-learning concept including teachers, local supervisors, school leaders and external consultants. The interviews conducted aimed towards generating data, which enabled us to extrapolate the active logics in the actor's experiences of the training program. We did this by conducting explorative interviews, related to the actor's experience of the planning, implementation and conduction of the training program. In our analysis of the active logics and expectations arising hereof was conducted through Clarkes situational analysis as described below.

Our method drew on an open data-driven approach, aiming to analyze the actor's experience of the planning, implementation and conduction of the action-learning concept. We based our methodological approach in Adele Clarkes (2009) "situational analysis" (Clarke et al., 2009), which is an approach allowing the data to provide the categories and hypotheses constructed (Clarke Et. Al. 2009). Through this approach we made use of Clarke's 'situational maps', which

is a mapping of all relevant actors in the concrete, observed situation, including both human, non-human actors and the related discourses (Clarke et. Al. 2009). This inductive approach allowed us to use data from the conducted interviews as a starting point to visualize local situational maps, which functioned as a mapping of all the relevant actors in the concrete situations, as they were experienced by the specific actors. We used these mappings to explore the active logics in the actor's experience of the training program and the expectations to the supervisor arising thereof. It was therefore the concrete situations as they were experienced by the actors, that functioned as our analytical starting points (Clarke et. Al. 2009).

Our methodological/theoretical perspective allowed us to view the logics subjecting the supervisor to specific expectations as phenomenon's highly conditioned by local empirical circumstances. The logics identified respectively among the actor's, thus enabled us to explore the supervisors possibilities of meeting these expectations, in order to participate in and support the training program and the participating actors. In our analysis, we viewed "the action learning-project" as an actor, since we have identified that the action-learning concept has embedded expectations to the supervisor. The training-program itself can thereby be seen as a bearer of a specific logic that subjects the supervisor to specific expectations.

### **Expected outcomes/results (up to 300 words):**

Our research identifies the simultaneously presence of three logics: a *curriculum logic*, a *workplace logic* and an *action-learning logic*. This translates into the following expectations:

- **The teachers** expects a front figure who is able to guide them academically
- **The school leaders** expects the supervisor to be guarantor of the teachers development and to handle executive tasks
- **The project** expects a project manager who is guarantor of the implementation of the project

In the *curriculum logic*, the teachers expect the supervisor to be a professional front figure, and to be updated on new trends in didactics and thereby able to guide colleagues. In this logic, the supervisor has a coaching function in relation to his colleagues, were the supervisor is partly on equal footing with colleagues, and partly an academic beacon that facilitates development. Nevertheless, in the simultaneously present *workplace logic*, the school leader uses the supervisor to fill an executive and monitoring function to guarantee the development of the teachers. Thus, it is mainly due to the double role as teacher *and* supervisor these contradictory expectations arise.

Simultaneously, we have identified expectations to the supervisor embedded in an *action-learning logic*. In this logic, the 'action-learning project' expects the supervisors to facilitate and to run the project. Since the teachers do not prioritize the action-learning project, this task translates into the 'persuasion' of colleagues to participate, forcing them to 'push the project through'. This requires an amount of integrity that the supervisors express not to be in possession of since they are supervisors, but also teachers at the same time. Although the role

of the supervisor has great potential in anchoring the concept, our research reveals that the contradictory expectations facing the supervisor is a great hinder for the supervisor to fulfill any of the roles expected.

### **Intent of publication**

National journal.

### **References (400 words)**

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